

**FIRST BRITISH RECORD OF *POLYMIXIS GEMMEA*
(TREITSCHKE, 1825) (LEPIDOPTERA: NOCTUIDAE)**

P. WAITE

*The Four Horseshoes, Cockpole Green, Wargrave, Reading,
Berkshire, RG10 8NT.*

At the 1987 BENHS Annual Exhibition, I exhibited a specimen of *Polymixis gemmea* (Waite, 1988). The moth was taken at light in my garden in East Berkshire on the night of 1.ix.79.

In spite of the late date and being something like 40 miles from the nearest coast as the crow flies, the only noctuid I could find on the British list which resembled my specimen, was *Hadena albimacula* (Borkh.) and this I assumed it to be.

It was not until 7 years later, as a result of a casual conversation with Brian Baker, that I examined the moth more closely. It was then apparent that the similarity to *H. albimacula* was superficial and I began to believe I might have something that had not been previously recorded.

Shortly afterwards, I received the first volume of the facsimile publication of Culot's *Noctuelles et géomètres d'Europe* and found what I believed to be an illustration of my noctuid, referred to by Culot as *Hadena gemmea*. It was at this point I took it to the BMNH where Martin Honey confirmed its determination as *Polymixis gemmea*.

This species is, apparently, widespread in the northern part of Continental Europe, occurring as far north as Finland and reaching northern France in the south. Two specimens in the BMNH are recorded as having been taken in Corsica, although these records are thought to be suspect. Martin Honey believes that Seitz's reference



Fig. 1. *Polymixis gemmea*.

to Corsica as a locality probably stems from his having had sight of the BMNH specimens at some time.

Various authors give the grasses *Deschampsia cespitosa* and *Phleum pratense* as the larval food plants.

As this species did not seem to be known for its migratory habits, it seemed to me likely that my specimen was an accidental import. I have, however, recently received a letter from Mr R. F. Bretherton who has been kind enough to draw my attention to the fact that the period which bracketed the date on which the moth was taken, was one of unsettled weather with south and south-westerly winds prevailing. Bretherton & Chalmers Hunt (1980) refer to a large number of immigrants entering the British Isles in late August and early September. As a consequence, Mr Bretherton believes conditions were such that my *P. gemnea* was more likely to be a natural immigrant than an import, as I had originally supposed.

The specimen is a male with a wingspan of 34 mm and is in very good condition. The coloration is very similar to that of *H. albimacula* although, as Fig. 1 shows, the ornamentation on the forewings is more elaborate. It does seem possible that the similarity between these two species is such, that other specimens of *P. gemnea* could be overlooked as a result of their being mistaken for *H. albimacula*, particularly if they were to be taken in the latter's coastal haunts.

REFERENCES

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